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ABSTRACT

A review of practices for the recruitment and preservice training of foster care parents was conducted. Foster care professionals were consulted and the literature on foster care was researched to identify causes for the nationwide shortage of foster parents. Professionals' views were sought on how best to recruit and provide initial training to foster parents. After an executive summary and introduction, the analysis is presented under the following topics: (1) reasons for the critical shortage of foster parents; (2) principles of effective foster parent recruiting; (3) principles of effective foster parent preservice training; and (4) evaluation and demonstration of effective recruiting strategies. The report also contains a recommendation that the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of various foster parent recruiting strategies. Appendices provide highlights of selected states' foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs, comments from DHHS, and other related material. Fifty references are cited. (RH)

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August 1989

FOSTER PARENTS

Recruiting and Preservice Training Practices Need Evaluation

PS 018425

GAO/HRD-89-86

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Human Resources Division

B-200518

August 3, 1989

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
House of Representatives

The Honorable Dan Coats
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Children, Family,
Drugs, and Alcoholism
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate

In response to your September 22, 1988, letter, this report presents the results of our review of practices for the recruitment and preservice training of foster care parents. It also discusses reasons for the nationwide shortage of foster parents and difficulties in their recruitment and retention.

The report contains a recommendation that the Secretary of Health and Human Services conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of various foster parent recruiting strategies.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report for 30 days from its issue date. At that time, copies will be sent to the Secretary of Health and Human Services and other interested parties. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Linda G. Morra
Director of Select
Congressional Studies

Executive Summary

Purpose

With the rising incidence (or increasing identification) of child abuse and neglect, more children are entering foster care; yet in the face of this increasing need for care there are fewer foster parents. At the request of Congressman J. Dennis Hastert, a member of the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, and Senator Dan Coats, Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee on Children, Family, Drugs, and Alcoholism, Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, GAO consulted foster care professionals and researched literature on foster care to identify causes for the nationwide shortage of foster parents, and sought professionals' views on how best to recruit and provide initial training to foster parents.

Background

Foster care provides children, whose families do not provide suitable care for them, temporary physical care, emotional support, and other services to protect and promote their growth and development. Children come into foster care through child welfare and juvenile justice systems or are voluntarily placed in foster care by their parents. Foster care is intended to last only until either children can be reunited with their families or some other permanent placement, such as adoption, can be arranged. The American Public Welfare Administration's data show that about 276,000 children were in foster care at the end of fiscal year 1985, 182,400 of these in foster family homes.

Foster care is managed by state and local government agencies and financed through a combination of federal, state, and local funds. Federal support is provided largely under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act. Fiscal year 1989 appropriations of title IV-B funds were about $247 million while appropriations of title IV-E funds were about $941 million. The aggregate amount of state and local funding for foster care is not readily available.

Results in Brief

Foster care professionals report that recruiting and retaining foster parents is becoming increasingly difficult. They believe (1) a lack of support for foster parents in dealing with the more complex emotional, behavioral, and physical problems of today's foster children; (2) the poor public image of foster care; and (3) changes in society, such as more working women, are causes for the decreased pool of potential foster parents from which to recruit. (See ch. 1.)

Professionals state that foster parent recruiting is most effective when (1) there is a program of community education, involvement, and support; (2) foster parents are used as recruiters; and (3) there are continuous, positive, targeted recruiting messages directed at all possible sources of potential foster parents. (See ch. 3.)

Foster parents can also benefit from preservice training, which is provided before social service agencies approve parents and place foster children with them. Preservice training can contribute to foster parent retention when it (1) helps select appropriate parents who are likely to continue fostering and (2) prepares foster parents for the challenges of caring for foster children. (See ch. 4.)

Reliable data on state recruitment and retention of foster parents are not generally available. Few formal evaluations of states' foster parent recruiting and preservice training strategies have been conducted. Because the strategies that states use to recruit foster parents vary, and little empirical evidence exists as to which are better, validating the effectiveness of various strategies could be useful. (See ch. 5.)

GAO's Analysis

Critical Shortage of Foster Parents

Increasing numbers of foster parents are ceasing to provide care because they do not receive support and positive recognition in dealing with difficulties they face in caring for today's foster children. Such difficulties include violent and sexually precocious behavior, risks that foster families will be exposed to communicable disease, and false allegations of abuse against foster parents by birth parents. (See pp. 19-21.)

Examples of the lack of support for and recognition of foster parents include:

- failure of some social service agencies to treat foster parents with respect and to establish working partnerships among foster parents, birth parents, potential adoptive parents, children, and the agencies;
- low foster parent reimbursement rates;
- little respite for foster families;
- difficulty obtaining liability protection;
- inaccessible social service agency case workers; and
- insufficient foster parent training. (See pp. 14-18.)

Principles of Effective Foster Parent Recruiting

Professionals indicate that recruiting programs can create a larger pool of potential foster parents by educating communities about foster care and obtaining community participation in recruiting, supporting, and recognizing foster parents. Recruiting themes should (1) present a realistic picture of the difficulties of caring for today's foster children; (2) emphasize the temporary nature of foster care and the need for a working partnership with social service agencies; and (3) communicate a positive message about the role of foster parents. Foster parents are the most effective recruiters because they convey realistic expectations about foster care and can best answer potential foster parents' questions. (See ch. 3.)

Preservice Training Is a Decision Tool

Foster parents preservice training is a continuation of foster parent recruiting. Professionals believe that preservice training should enable potential foster parents to make informed decisions about whether they want or are able to provide the care required by foster children. At the same time, preservice training should enable social service agencies to assess the suitability of families to care for foster children. Preservice training can set the stage for necessary teamwork between social service agencies and foster parents on the care and needs of foster children. (See ch. 4.)

Evaluation of Recruiting Strategies

Strategies for recruiting and preservice training of foster parents asserted by foster care professionals and practiced in varying degrees by some states have received little formal evaluation. Federal grants to demonstrate effective strategies provide for measuring results against expected outcomes, but few plan for a comprehensive evaluation examining the effectiveness of various demonstration activities. (See pp. 36-38.)

Recommendations

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Health and Human Services conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of the various foster parent recruiting strategies. (See p. 41.)

Agency Comments

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) agreed with GAO's recommendation and stated that this report provides a useful overview of problems in recruiting and training foster parents. (See app. IV.)

In fiscal year 1989, HHS plans to fund a nationwide study of issues affecting foster parent recruiting and retention. This study should provide information that foster care administrators can use to improve their programs' effectiveness. However, a comparative analysis of various states' foster parent recruiting strategies is also needed to help states improve the effectivenss of their recruiting programs. For example, a comparative evaluation of the relative effectiveness of contracting with foster parent associations for foster parent recruiting as opposed to using state employees for recruiting would be useful to foster care administrators in designing their foster parent recruiting programs.

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Abbreviations

ACYF	Administration for Children, Youth, and Families
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
APWA	American Public Welfare Association
CDP	Coordinated Discretionary (grant) Program
GAO	General Accounting Office
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
MAPP	Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting

Introduction

Foster parents—people who are willing to provide full-time substitute parental care to children outside of their birth homes—are in critically short supply and, according to foster care professionals, the situation is getting worse. The rising incidence (or increasing identification) of child abuse and neglect is bringing more children into foster care; yet in the face of this increasing need there are fewer foster parents available. In some cases children are being shuttled from one place to another until a proper home is found.

At the request of Congressman J. Dennis Hastert, a member of the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, and Senator Dan Coats, Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee on Children, Family, Drugs, and Alcoholism, Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, we identified reasons for the shortage of foster parents and practices necessary for successful foster parent recruiting and preservice training. Preservice training occurs before approval of foster homes by states' social service agencies and before placement of foster children in foster homes.[1]

Foster Care Is Substitute Parental Care

Foster care is full-time substitute parental care provided to children whose parents or families do not provide suitable care for them. The goal of foster care is to promote children's growth and development by providing them with a safe, nurturing environment and relationship with a parenting person. Foster care is intended to be temporary until either children can be reunited with their families or some other permanent placement, such as adoption, can be arranged. Foster care programs are operated and funded primarily by state and local governments and receive federal funding largely under the Social Security Act. Children are placed in foster care by child welfare systems, juvenile justice systems, or voluntarily by their parents.

Foster care is provided to children in family homes, group homes, emergency shelters, residential treatment centers, maternity homes, mental retardation facilities, correctional institutions, and other types of living arrangements. Foster parents provide foster care in family homes. Estimates developed by the American Public Welfare Association (APWA)

[1]Foster homes may have one or two foster parents and may also refer to the physical dwelling of a foster family (such as when reference is made to state approval of foster homes). Some states "approve" foster homes and some "license" them. Foster homes and foster parents are not separately approved or licensed; a foster home would not be approved without foster parents and vice versa. States we visited tabulate the number of foster homes approved or licensed and do not distinguish the number of individual parents in the homes.

indicate that about 66 percent of all children in foster care reside in foster family homes. Based on APWA data, about 276,000 children were in foster care at the end of fiscal year 1985 (the latest year for which data are available); 182,400 of these children were living in foster family homes.[2]

Public Law 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, encourages permanency planning for children. The goal of permanency planning for children, and therefore foster care, is family reunification or adoption. The act was intended to help prevent foster children from spending years in the public child welfare system with little hope of being reunited with their families or of finding permanent homes elsewhere. The act encourages states to operate a comprehensive set of child welfare services, procedures, and safeguards intended to (1) avoid unnecessary removal of children from their homes, (2) prevent extended stays in foster care, and (3) ensure that efforts are made to reunify children with their families or place them for adoption. The act emphasizes placement of foster children in the least restrictive (most family-like) setting available.

Federal Funding for Foster Care

Federal funding for foster care is provided primarily under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act.[3] The title IV-B child welfare services program authorizes 75 percent federal matching grants to state agencies to help pay the costs of services to children,[4] including children who are in foster care, handicapped, homeless, dependent, or neglected. The services may address child neglect, abuse, exploitation or delinquency, the prevention of unnecessary separation of children from their families, the restoration of children to their families, or placement of children in adoptive homes. States may also use these funds for related administrative expenses. Fiscal year 1989 appropriations for child welfare services

[2]This estimate is based on data gathered by APWA on the living arrangements of children in foster care provided by 35 states and data on the number of children in all forms of foster care provided by 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The estimate includes children in nonfinalized adoptive homes. A nonfinalized adoptive home refers to a home in which a child is residing with prospective adoptive parents and court approval of the adoption is pending the results of a trial period. Tatara, T., Characteristics of Children in Substitute and Adoptive Care: A Statistical Summary of the VCIS National Child Welfare Data Base. Washington, DC: American Public Welfare Association, July 1988, pp. 3, 10, 22, 23, 68, and 101.

[3]Information is not readily available on the total amount of state funding for foster care.

[4]The federal government provides 75 cents for every 25 cents contributed by a state.

under title IV-B were about $247 million.[5] Because there have been few reporting requirements for this program, there are no reliable data on the number of children served, their characteristics, or the services provided.

The title IV-E foster care program benefits children who would otherwise be eligible for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. States may use federal matching title IV-E funds for the cost of providing food, shelter, clothing, daily supervision, school supplies, personal incidentals, and liability insurance for the child and for reasonable travel costs to the child's home for visits. They may also use these funds for related administrative expenses, including training state employees and recruiting and licensing foster homes. The federal matching rate for maintenance payments in a given state is that state's Medicaid matching rate. The matching rate for administrative costs is 50 percent and, for training of employees, 75 percent. In fiscal year 1989, state Medicaid matching rates ranged from 50 percent to almost 80 percent. Fiscal year 1989 appropriations under title IV-E earmarked for AFDC foster care were about $941 million.[6] The estimated average monthly number of children in AFDC foster care in fiscal year 1987 was 109,000, the highest since 1980.

The Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) in the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS's) Office of Human Development Services is responsible for administering federal foster care funds. ACYF develops and issues program policy through regulations, guidelines, and policy notices. The Children's Bureau within ACYF reviews the eligibility of state claims for federal money under titles IV-B and IV-E of the Social Security Act.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Responding to the congressmen's request, we studied foster parent recruiting and preservice training strategies. The objectives of our review were to

- identify reasons for the shortage of foster parents,
- identify principles of effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training,

[5]U.S. House of Representatives, Conference Report 100-880, Washington, DC, August 11, 1988, p. 82, and Public Law 100-436, September 20, 1988, "Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1989."

[6]Conference Report 100-880, p. 84, and Public Law 100-436.

- describe state or local programs embodying these principles, and
- review available data that evaluate foster parent recruiting and preservice training principles and strategies.

To identify reasons for the shortage of foster parents and principles of foster parent recruiting and preservice training, we conducted telephone or in-person interviews with (1) professionals affiliated with the major organizations that deal with foster care issues, (2) cognizant HHS officials, and (3) officials in five states. Many of the foster care professionals we talked to were also foster parents. We also conducted a bibliographic search of published literature on foster care. Appendix II contains a list of the persons with whom we spoke, and a bibliography of the literature we reviewed is at the end of this report.

From referrals and published sources we identified foster care professionals with recognized expertise. We sought referrals and references until the names of professionals began to repeat. Our query of foster care professionals included child welfare professionals, representatives of child welfare advocacy groups and foster parent associations, foster parents, academicians, foster care consultants, federal officials, and officials of state and local governmental or private social service agencies responsible for operating foster care programs. We believe that the views of the foster care professionals with whom we spoke represent the current thinking on foster parent shortage problems and recruiting and preservice training practices.

We asked foster care professionals to identify the reasons for the shortage of foster parents, difficulties in their recruitment and retention, and the principles of effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training. These professionals assert that the principles we discuss in this report are necessary for effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs. We did not perform an independent evaluation or verification of the effectiveness of these recruiting and preservice training principles or causes cited for the shortage of foster parents.

Some of the professionals who identified principles of effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training also identified several foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs that they believe embody the principles necessary for success. They provided materials describing these programs, such as foster parent association and social service agency newsletters, training session agendas and handouts, foster parent handbooks, advertisements, contracts, policy statements, and

operating procedures. From these nominated programs, we selected four state foster care programs and a local one for further review. Our criteria for selecting the five programs included: (1) nomination by foster care professionals, (2) type of recruiting or training program used (e.g., use of existing program versus locally developed program), (3) geographic diversity, and (4) program size (i.e., state versus local).

We concentrated our review efforts on the foster care programs of Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Illinois, and Region XI of Texas' Department of Human Services. We obtained information about the foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs of these localities by visiting these states and interviewing state and local officials principally responsible for operating them. In some cases these officials were also foster parents. We also obtained documentation that described these programs.

We did not conduct a survey of all state and local foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs and we did not find any nationwide surveys of such programs. The programs nominated to us likely do not include all programs that employ principles necessary for effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training. Furthermore, the programs we reviewed are only some of those identified to us as embodying the principles needed for effective programs.

We also sought information, including statistics and formal evaluation studies, on the effectiveness of foster parent recruiting and preservice training principles and programs.

Our review was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Reasons for Critical Shortage of Foster Parents

Foster care professionals report a critical shortage of foster parents nationwide. This is because more children are entering foster care but fewer parents are available. Foster care professionals also report difficulty in recruiting and retaining foster parents. This is largely due to a lack of support for and positive recognition of foster parents. Also contributing to the shortage of foster parents are (1) the poor public image of foster care; (2) changes in society, such as more working women, that have decreased the pool of potential foster parents from which to recruit; and (3) greater difficulties of caring for today's foster children. Most foster care professionals agreed on the factors contributing to the shortage of foster parents discussed in this chapter.

More Children Entering Foster Care but Fewer Foster Parents Available

The rising incidence (or identification) of child abuse and neglect is bringing more children into foster care, according to foster care professionals; yet in the face of this increasing need fewer foster parents are available to provide foster care. Data collected by the American Public Welfare Association indicate that the number of children in foster care increased from 269,000 at the end of fiscal year 1983, to 276,000 at the end of fiscal year 1985. Estimates of children specifically in foster family homes during this period are not comparable largely due to a revision in APWA's data-gathering instrument.

The National Foster Parent Association reports that nearly every state is experiencing a serious shortage of foster families. In some states the shortage is so great that children are being shuttled from one place to another, such as temporary homes, institutions, or hospitals, until a proper home is found. There are reports that children, even preschool children, are being placed in child care institutions because appropriate foster homes are not available. Some children are sent to shelters or back to their birth home where problems may get worse.

Foster Parent Turnover Is High

Foster care professionals report that many foster care programs are recruiting and licensing large numbers of foster parents, but retaining only a few. Many foster parents leave foster care in their first year. A foster care professional from Eastern Michigan University estimated in 1987 that in some social service agencies as many as 60 percent of the new parents were no longer providing care at the end of their first year.[1] In 1978, NOVA University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, had estimated that

[1]P. Ryan, "Foster Family Recruitment and Retention," Institute for the Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1987, p. 1.

a number of social service agencies experienced up to a 40-percent annual turnover rate among all their foster parents.[2]

Lack of Support and Positive Recognition

We found a consensus among foster care professionals we consulted that a lack of support services and positive recognition of foster parents are major factors causing difficulties in recruiting and retaining foster parents. Examples of the lack of foster parent support and recognition that professionals cited included:

- the failure of some social service agencies to treat foster parents with respect and to establish working partnerships among foster parents, birth parents, potential adoptive parents, foster children, and themselves;
- low foster parent reimbursement rates;
- little respite for foster families;
- the difficulty of foster parents to obtain liability protection;
- the inaccessibility to foster parents of many overworked social service agency caseworkers; and
- insufficient foster parent training.

Need for Respect and Working Partnerships

Social service agencies need to treat foster parents with respect and accord status to the foster parent role. We were told that foster parents are often made to feel inadequate for not being able to handle difficult situations that foster children create. Foster parent recruiting and retention is affected by how parents are treated and the honesty with which they are informed about children being assigned to them.

Social service agencies need to establish a working partnership among foster parents, birth parents, potential adoptive parents, foster children,

[2]NOVA University Foster Parent Project, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, "Recruitment and Retention of Foster Families," position paper prepared for the National Congress on Foster Family Care, Houston, Texas, April 1978, p. 1.

and themselves.[3] Furthermore, the roles of agency caseworkers and foster parents are not clearly defined and, therefore, they lack a clear understanding as to who is responsible for what.[4] For example, one professional writes that foster parents may feel that unrealistic demands are being placed upon them if, after accepting responsibility for providing foster care for children, they find they are expected to provide services they thought were the responsibility of the social service agency, such as providing transportation, meeting medical appointments, and attending school conferences for foster children. Conversely, some agency caseworkers may feel that foster parents overstep their bounds when they take the initiative to do things that caseworkers see as their responsibility.[5]

The need for respect for the work of foster parents and a working partnership was illustrated by two surveys in California in 1986. In one survey of 180 foster parents in San Diego County, foster parents said that being treated with professional respect and as a team member by social workers were the most important factors for their continued participation as foster parents. Another survey, of 175 foster homes in Sonoma County, indicated that foster parents desired an opportunity to form a team relationship with social workers, and improve communication and trust for the benefit of the child.

Low Reimbursement Rates

Foster care professionals report that state reimbursement rates are generally too low to cover all the costs foster parents incur in caring for children. Reimbursement payments are intended to cover foster children's living expenses, such as food, clothing, shelter, and recreation.

[3]E.M. Pasztor and E.M. Burgess, "Finding and Keeping More Foster Parents," Children Today, March-April 1982, p. 3; E.M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting: Implications for Recruitment, Selection, Training, and Retention," Children and Youth Services Review, Vol. 7, 1985, pp. 199 and 200; P. Ryan, "Developing Educational Seminars, Workshops and Conferences in Foster Care," Institute for the Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1987, p. 2; E.M. Pasztor, Preparation for Fostering - A Preservice Training Manual for Foster Families, adapted by Gaetana Woolf, NOVA University, 1987, pp. 62e2 and 43; NOVA University Foster Parent Project, p. 3; McFadden, E.J. "Practice in Foster Care," Chapter 22 of A Handbook of Child Welfare: Context, Knowledge and Practice, edited by Joan Laird and Ann Hartman, The Free Press, New York, p. 614; P. Ryan, E.J. McFadden, and B.J. Warren, Foster Families: A Resource for Helping Parents," Chapter 11 of The Challenge of Partnership: Working With Parents of Children in Foster Care, edited by A.N. Maluccio and P.A. Sinanoglu, University of Connecticut and Child Welfare League of America, 1981, p. 197.

[4]E.M. Pasztor and E.M. Burgess, "Finding and Keeping More Foster Parents," p. 3; E. M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting . . .," pp. 192, 194, 200, and 201; NOVA University Foster Parent Project, pp. 3 and 4; K.S. Eastman, "Sources of Ambiguity in the Foster Care System," Smith College Studies in Social Work, Vol. 52, No. 3, 1982, pp. 234 and 235.

[5]K.S. Eastman, "Sources of Ambiguity in the Foster Care System," p. 235.

Foster care professionals do not believe that reimbursement rates are high enough to cover all of these expenses and noted that foster parents are generally not reimbursed for day care costs they incur in caring for foster children.[6] Furthermore, they note, getting day care for foster children is often difficult because of their frequent emotional and other problems.

Two studies on reimbursement rates concluded that increases in such rates would result in an increase in the number of available foster homes.[7] One of these studies concluded that although increasing reimbursement rates would positively influence foster parents' initial decision to provide care, decisions on caring for additional children were influenced by the presence or absence of problems encountered in dealing with social service agencies.

Little Respite for Foster Families

Very few localities provide respite care for foster families, according to professionals. Respite care is designed to give foster parents temporary relief from their day-to-day responsibilities as foster parents. In some states it involves providing temporary and short-term care for or supervision of a foster child with difficult problems on behalf of the foster parent. When foster parents care for children with serious emotional or behavioral problems, they need time when they can get away from the pressure of continuous care.[8] Respite care may be provided in emergencies or on an intermittent basis to relieve the daily stresses and demands of caring for a foster child. Respite care can include homemaker and sitter services in or out of the home; it generally excludes moving children from a home environment to an institution.

Lack of Liability Protection

Many foster parents have reportedly had difficulty obtaining protection against, for example, damages or losses to property caused by foster children, acts or claims made by third parties against them, and claims made against them by foster children or persons acting on their behalf

[6]Information compiled by APWA indicates that monthly reimbursement rates in July 1987 ranged from a low of $130 a month in Mississippi for a child 2 years old or younger to a high of $565 a month in Alaska for a child 16 years or older.

[7]J.L. Simon, "The Effect of Foster Care Payment Levels on the Number of Foster Children in Given Homes." Social Service Review 49, September 1975, pp. 405-411; C. Campbell, and S.W. Downs. "The Impact of Economic Incentives on Foster Parents." Social Service Review, December 1987, pp. 608 and 609.

[8]J. Terpstra, "The Rich and Exacting Role of the Social Worker in Family Foster Care," Child and Adolescent Social Work, Vol. 4, Nos. 3 and 4. Fall-Winter 1987, p. (173)25.

alleging negligence on the part of the foster parents. The National Foster Parent Association has received reports from foster parent recruiters in many states that potential foster parents withdraw at the last minute when they learn that there is no liability protection.

Overworked and Inaccessible Foster Care Case Workers

Many social service agency workers are overworked due to high caseloads, and this limits their accessibility to foster parents. The National Foster Parent Association reports that caseloads as high as 50 or more are not uncommon. The Director of the Child Welfare Institute told us that a caseload of 50 is considered high by child welfare professionals. He said that foster parents need assistance from agency caseworkers in resolving problems with their foster children, but because of the heavy caseloads, the assistance provided is limited.

Insufficient Foster Parent Training

Foster care professionals told us that generally foster parents are not given sufficient training for dealing with the problems of today's foster children. The prologue to a training program for child welfare professionals, who train foster parents, developed by the New York State Child Welfare Institute states that children in foster care spend more time with foster parents than with any other representatives of the child welfare system,[9] yet foster parents are the least trained, prepared, and supported. A study evaluating the effects of foster parent training found that trained foster parents are more likely to continue caring for foster children.[10] This can help avoid unnecessary movements of children from foster home to foster home (i.e., placement disruptions), which can be harmful to children by denying them consistent support and nurturing.

Professionals report that inadequate training and support for foster parents in dealing with separation and loss issues, which are inherent in foster care, hinders recruiting and retention. Professionals point out that foster parents love, provide, and care for other people's children on a voluntary basis, without compensation or salary but then must give those children up either for adoption or return to a home where they may have been previously abused. They stress that foster parents and

[9]New York State Child Welfare Training Institute, State University College at Buffalo Social Services Training Project, Fosterparentscope: A Program for Foster Parent Trainers, Buffalo, New York. Copyright 1985, pp. i and iii.

[10]L.H. Boyd, Jr., and L.L. Remy, "Foster Parents Who Stay Licensed and the Role of Training," Journal of Social Service Research 2, Summer 1979, pp. 373-387.

their families should receive training to prepare them for dealing with separation and loss issues when foster children leave their homes.

Federal matching funds are available for direct expenses of training state child welfare employees but not foster parents. Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides 75 percent matching funds for state expenditures to train state employees involved in foster care. Fifty percent matching funds are provided under this title for other foster care administrative expenses, including foster home recruiting. According to federal regulations, matching funds under this title for training foster parents are limited to travel and per diem costs.

Poor Public Image of Foster Care

Foster parent recruiting is hampered by the poor public image of foster care and negative publicity it receives. The public, foster care professionals assert, does not understand foster care, the difficult job that foster parents have, or what foster parents do for children. Noting that it is difficult to recruit people for a job having a bad public image, professionals observe that what most people hear about foster care is all its problems. Some view the care of foster children as poorly paid, low-status work.

Social service agency officials in four of the five states we visited said that a national foster care publicity campaign would assist them in their recruitment efforts by helping to educate the public about and raise the public image of foster care and foster parents.

Such a campaign would provide needed national recognition of foster parents that might help recruiting and retention. National media organizations and state broadcast organizations and their local counterparts could encourage multimedia, multicultural campaigns to promote support services and respect for foster parents.

Changing Societal Trends Decrease Pool of Potential Foster Parents

Changing societal trends have decreased the pool of foster parents from which recruits can be drawn. The increase in working women, divorce rates, two-breadwinner families, single parents, and the increased cost of rearing children have caused a decrease in the number of traditional households willing and able to take on an additional child.[11] Because of these changes in society, professionals state that many households

[11]Traditional household is understood to mean a household where one parent stays at home during the day.

today are not in a position to volunteer their time and money to care for someone else's child. Notwithstanding these societal trends, foster care professionals say that some agencies have not changed their foster parent licensing requirement that at least one parent be at home all day to care for a preschool age foster child. This limits the number of households that would qualify to provide foster care.

Greater Difficulties and Risks of Providing Foster Care

The difficulties of being a foster parent to today's children were emphasized by professionals as reasons for the shortage of foster parents. They say that the complex problems of today's foster children make them more difficult to work with. Also, the severe problems of foster children expose foster families to risks of physical harm, property damage, communicable disease, and lawsuits.

Foster Children Have Complex Problems

We were told that children entering foster care today are more difficult to work with than those in the past because often they have been more severely harmed and are more disturbed. Many children entering foster care have been or are battered, malnourished, sexually abused, physically handicapped, mentally retarded, or drug-affected. Such children have a combination of severe emotional, physical, and behavioral problems and need extensive help and specialized care. Some foster children have special medical problems, such as being infected with acquired immunodefiency syndrome (AIDS) or having congenital defects. These children often require constant care and have specialized medical requirements.

Risks of Foster Parenting

The severe problems of foster children today expose foster parents and their families to physical, emotional, and legal risks. Such risks include the following: (1) violent "acting out" behavior of foster children,[12] (2) precocious sexual behavior toward foster siblings or adults by foster children who have experienced sexual abuse, (3) communicable diseases carried by some foster children, and (4) the financial and emotional cost of defending against accusations of abuse made by foster children or

[12]"Acting out" refers to behavior that is out of proportion, inappropriate, or bears no relation to the present reality of the situation at hand. Rather, the acting out behavior is an expression of emotions displaced from another situation to the present. The displaced emotions and behavior result from unresolved conflicts on the part of the individual.

their birth parents against foster parents, even if the accusations are unfounded.

Violent Behavior

Children entering foster care are usually traumatized by family dysfunction and separation, and it is common for these children to engage in acting out behavior.[13] Typical acting out behaviors exhibited by foster children include lying, stealing, breaking things, disobeying rules, throwing temper tantrums, bedwetting, and cursing.[14] A foster parent we interviewed gave an example of an adolescent foster child who upon first coming into their home cut up the dining room chairs with a knife.

Sexually Precocious Behavior

Sexually abused foster children present a major challenge to foster parents and expose foster families to risk. Such foster children may exhibit sexually precocious behaviors that are disruptive to the foster family. These behaviors may include provocative sexual behavior toward a birth child or foster parent, inappropriate touching, public masturbation, suggestive language, or sexual exploitation of other children.[15] Managing these behaviors presents a serious challenge to foster parents. The National Foster Parent Association reports that foster families today face increasing risk of exposure to such behavior.

Communicable Disease

The National Foster Parent Association also reports that children are sometimes placed in foster care before any medical history has been obtained or medical exam performed in order to remove the children from harmful or dangerous situations as quickly as possible. Under such situations, foster parents and social service agencies may not know if foster children have communicable diseases that require precautions to be taken to protect others from exposure. Foster families in such cases are subject to unknown risks.

False Allegations of Abuse

Foster care professionals assert that false allegations of child abuse against foster homes and the fear of such has had a serious negative impact on recruiting and retaining foster families. When such allegations are made against foster parents, they usually must employ and pay a lawyer to defend themselves. In these instances, social service agencies' first obligation is to the foster children. The director of the information and services office of the National Foster Parent Association told us that

[13]NOVA University Foster Family Preservice Training Handouts, p. 23.

[14]E.M. Pasztor, Preparation for Fostering . . . , p. 132a8; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Division of Program Operations, Foster Parent Handbook, May 1988, pp. I-16 and 17.

[15]Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Foster Parent Handbook, p. IV-6.

foster parents cannot usually afford to hire a lawyer. The process of working through these child abuse allegations presents tension and stress for foster families. Also, the accused is stigmatized whether or not guilt is ever established. A survey conducted in Illinois of foster parents who were leaving foster care indicated that many foster parents felt "out on a limb" and vulnerable to allegations of abuse. Foster parents need support and adequate training in order to know what to do both before and after an allegation of abuse is made. Foster care professionals report that foster parents can be specifically trained to help prevent these situations, or to deal effectively with them once the allegation is made.

Principles of Effective Foster Parent Recruiting

Professionals believe that successful foster parent recruiting programs educate communities about foster care and involve the communities in supporting foster parents and recognizing the service they provide. Using foster parents as recruiters and supporting foster parent associations contributes to successful foster parent recruiting. Professionals emphasize a need for foster parent recruiting programs to use positive recruiting themes that realistically portray the difficulties of foster parenting, and to mount continuous efforts to tap all sources of potential foster parents.

We found agreement among the foster care professionals we consulted on the principles for effective foster parent recruiting discussed in this chapter. Also, the five state foster parent recruiting programs we reviewed were similar in that their recruiting efforts were based on the principles discussed in this chapter. These five states' programs differed primarily in the degree of emphasis placed on various principles and the specific techniques or strategies used to implement the principles. For example, while all the state recruiting programs believed in the effectiveness of foster parents as recruiters, in New Jersey, the foster parent association operates the entire statewide recruiting program under a state contract. In Massachusetts, state employees run the foster parent recruiting program with foster parents participating in the program on an unpaid, voluntary basis. In Michigan, foster parents are paid incentives or bonuses of $100 for each new foster parent recruited. Examples of the five states' foster parent recruiting programs are cited in this chapter; appendix I contains a summary of each state's program.

Community Education and Involvement

Successful foster parent recruiting requires that communities be educated about and involved in foster care.[1] A more knowledgeable community provides a larger pool of prospective foster parents. Foster care professionals assert that attempts should be made to educate the public about the important and complex job of foster parenting and to instill a positive and consistent image of foster care in the community. Messages to the community should emphasize that foster care is a community problem.

For example, in New Jersey, the statewide foster parent association, as part of a public education campaign to heighten public awareness of the role of foster parents and foster care issues, conducts public foster care

[1]E.M. Pasztor and E.M. Burgess, "Finding and Keeping More Foster Parents," pp. 3-5; NOVA University Foster Parent Project, pp. 6 and 8.

forums and informs community leaders of the depth of foster care issues. It encourages community leaders and groups to become involved in recruiting foster parents. The state of Massachusetts undertakes numerous efforts to give recognition and appreciation to its foster parents. Throughout the year special recognition and appreciation events, such as dinners, are given for foster parents statewide. The state's governor designated May as the state's foster parent recognition month. In May the commissioner of social services holds an annual recognition event to honor outstanding foster parents statewide. Foster parents are presented with awards, and stories are read about their lives and achievements as foster parents. In addition, regional and area offices of the social service department hold recognition events.

Foster care professionals stress that community and social service agencies need to afford the foster parent role status and to professionalize that role through training and education. Use of job descriptions for foster parents is a way to begin community education and clarification of foster parent roles.[2]

Community support and recognition of foster care is needed to develop the support services necessary to recruit and retain foster parents. Community leaders and groups can provide the prestige, influence, and technical assistance needed to identify ways to overcome recruiting barriers. For example, involving heads of churches and synagogues; service organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus or Kiwanis; youth groups and civic groups, such as parent teacher organizations; labor unions; and major employers and the like in recruiting can be helpful. Leaders of such organizations can help recruit within and tap the resources of their own organizations. Businesses and companies, for example, can help recruiting through the donation of services, such as printing, supplies, or space to hold special functions.

In July 1987, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provided Harris County, Texas—on behalf of itself and the other 12 counties in east Texas comprising Region XI of the Texas Department of Human Services—a $196,200 federal grant titled "Community Approach to Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents." The purpose of the grant was to develop a community-based regionwide foster parent recruiting and retaining project to demonstrate the benefits of community involvement in foster care. The project's unique feature is that community volunteers work in partnership with Region XI staff and foster

[2]E.M. Pasztor, "Finding and Keeping More Foster Parents," pp. 3 and 4.

parents to develop more effective methods for recruiting and retaining foster parents. The project consists of locally organized and sponsored events to increase (1) awareness of the need for more foster parents, and (2) support and recognition of foster parents who serve the community's children.

Data collected on the project for Harris County, which has about 71 percent of all the foster children in the region, shows that, as of August 1988, compared with the same months in 1987, the county experienced a 59-percent increase in the rate at which new foster care homes were recruited and approved, and a 25-percent decrease in the rate at which foster care homes withdrew from the program.

Foster Parents Are Effective Recruiters

Foster care literature supports the principle that foster parents are highly effective recruiters.[3] One professional indicated, however, that social service agencies may be reluctant to use foster parents to recruit for fear of giving up "turf." Foster parents recruited by other foster parents are more likely to stay in foster care because their expectations are more realistic. Foster parent recruiters provide the most enthusiastic and realistic messages about foster parenting.[4] Furthermore, foster parents can best answer the questions of potential foster parents.

Officials of the National Foster Parent Association, the state of New Jersey, and the New Jersey Foster Parent Association state that supporting foster parent associations, for example, by funding the associations' newsletters and other foster parent outreach activities, has a positive effect in recruiting potential foster parents. Some foster care professionals believe that there is a strong correlation between the strength of a state's foster parent association and its success in recruiting and retaining foster parents.

The state of New Jersey contracts with the New Jersey Foster Parent Association to perform statewide recruiting and training of foster parents. The association employs field workers to assist with recruiting and public relations. These positions are held by foster parents who help recruit and retain foster parents.

[3]E.P. Smith and R.H. Gutheil, "Successful Foster Parent Recruiting: A Voluntary Agency Effort," Child Welfare, 67-No. 2, March-April 1988, p. 138. This article cites five studies supporting the finding.

[4]P. Ryan, "Foster Family Recruitment and Retention," p. 2.

In Massachusetts the state pays foster parents' membership fees in the state's foster parent association. The state also publishes a quarterly foster parent newsletter, which provides news of the foster parent association and information on training opportunities, and gives recognition to accomplishments of individual foster parents.

The state of Michigan has a mentor program which pays $100 to any foster parent who recruits a single parent or couple into the state's foster care program, provided that the newly recruited foster parent(s) stays for 6 months or more. The recruiting foster parent also serves as a mentor to the new foster parent during the 6-month period. This unique approach gives foster parents an added incentive to recruit and provides much needed support to new foster parents.

Positive and Realistic Recruiting Themes Are More Effective

Foster care literature and professionals indicate that recruiting themes are more effective when they

- present a realistic message about what the job of foster parent entails;
- emphasize the job of foster parent rather than the children needing care;
- send a positive message about the role of foster parents; and
- emphasize the need for temporary care for foster children and working as part of a team with children, birth parents, foster parents, potential adoptive parents, and social service agencies.[5]

Recruiting themes that appeal to people who are motivated to rescue or save children may attract persons with motivations that are not compatible with working with birth parents, and the reunification goal of foster care. Appeals to save children tend to appeal to persons who may see birth parents as bad rather than seeing families needing help. Recruiting themes that convey a sense of desperate need for foster parents may also scare away potential foster parents. Partnership in foster care among children, birth parents, foster parents, potential adoptive parents, and social service agencies is a key determinant of a program's ability to attract and retain foster parents.[6]

[5]E.M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting . . . ," pp. 194 and 195; E.M. Pasztor, "Finding and Keeping More Foster Families," pp. 3-5; A. Coyne, "Recruiting Foster and Adoptive Families: A Marketing Strategy," Children Today, September-October 1986, p. 33; P. Ryan, "Foster Family Recruitment and Retention," p. 2; NOVA University Foster Parent Project, pp. 3 and 5; P. Ryan, E.J. McFadden, and B.J. Warren, "Foster Families: A Resource for Helping Parents," p. 197.

[6]NOVA University Foster Parent Project, p. 3.

Targeting Recruiting Strategies to the Types of Homes Needed

Generalized recruiting campaigns usually do not attract enough foster parents interested in working with those children most in need of care.[7] Recruiting strategies aimed at getting the types of foster homes needed are more efficient than broad, general approaches which do not. Needs assessments should be done to determine the different types of foster homes needed (e.g., for Hispanic, black, or adolescent children; babies infected with AIDS; or children with other special medical needs).[8] Such assessments will help to indicate the types of strategies to be developed for recruiting parents to fill these needs. For example, if critical needs exist for homes for black or Hispanic children, programs might consider posters that picture black or Hispanic children and focus recruiting efforts at black and Hispanic community groups and neighborhoods. The state of Michigan has contracted with One Church, One Child of Michigan, Inc., to enlist the help of all churches with a significant black congregation in recruiting black foster parents.

Recruiting Efforts Should Be Continuous and Aimed at All Members of Potential Foster Families

Recruiting efforts that are continuous and varied are most effective because potential foster parents generally think about becoming foster parents for about a year before making their decision. Continuous messages, therefore, are more likely to hit foster parents at important points in their decision process. Continuous messages that are also varied have a reinforcing effect.[9]

In addition, recruiting efforts must reach all members of potential foster families—the mother, father, and children. Therefore, messages need to be designed to reach them. All members of potential foster families will be affected by and must cooperate in the care of any foster child entering the home.

[7]P. Ryan, "Foster Family Recruitment and Retention," p. 1; NOVA University Foster Family Preservice Training Handouts, p. 23.

[8]P. Ryan, "Systematic Development of Foster Parent Education," Institute for the Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, p. 1; A. Coyne, "Recruiting Foster and Adoptive Families . . . ," pp. 30 and 31.

[9]A. Coyne, "Recruiting Foster and Adoptive Families . . . ," p. 32; E.P. Smith and R.H. Gutheil, "Successful Foster Parent Recruiting . . . ," p. 139; B. Moore, M. Grandpre, and B. Scoll, "Foster Home Recruitment: A Market Research Approach to Attracting and Licensing Applicants," Child Welfare, Vol. 67, No. 2, March-April 1988, pp. 148-152.

Tapping All Potential Sources for Foster Families

Communities should try to tap all sources of potential foster parents. For example, single people should be considered as potential foster parents. The National Foster Parent Association suggests two other potential sources sometimes overlooked in recruiting efforts—senior citizens and former foster children. Retired medical personnel could be particularly helpful for foster children with special medical needs.

Principles of Effective Foster Parent Preservice Training

Foster care professionals assert that preservice training is a continuation of foster parent recruiting and should be used as a decision tool, as well as training, to select appropriate foster parents. They believe that successful preservice training should focus on selecting foster parents who can help foster children deal with the potentially damaging separation from their birth parents that occurs in foster care. Furthermore, preservice training should be the start of a working partnership involving mutual decisionmaking among foster parents and social service agencies, and prepare foster parents for their new roles. Two models of preservice training that embody these principles are discussed later in this chapter.

The foster care professionals we consulted agreed on the principles of foster parent preservice training discussed in this chapter. Also, the five state foster parent preservice training programs we reviewed were similar in that their programs were based on the principles discussed in this chapter. These five state programs differed primarily in the degree of emphasis placed on various principles and the specific techniques or strategies used to implement the principles. For example, while all the states' preservice training programs share a belief in the need to select foster parents who can help foster children deal with issues of separation, Massachusetts and Texas' Region XI specifically assess such capabilities. During preservice training in these states, potential foster parents are assessed in terms of (1) how they dealt with losses in their own lives and (2) whether they have the ability to help children move through the grieving process by accepting feelings of denial, anger, and depression. This assessment is part of the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting for Foster Parents and Adoptive Parents (MAPP) model for preservice training discussed later in this chapter. Examples of five states' foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs are cited in this chapter; appendix I contains a summary of each state's program.

Preservice Training Is a Decision Tool

Preservice training occurs before social service agencies approve foster parents and before they place foster children in foster homes. During preservice training, potential foster families make their final decisions about fostering, and social service agencies obtain information about whether to approve potential foster families. Ideally, during preservice training potential foster parents learn about the requirements, responsibilities, expectations, and skills needed to foster and make an informed decision about whether they want to foster. Social service agencies assess the ability, readiness, and appropriateness of families to foster.

As a decision tool, effective preservice training

- provides potential foster parents with enough information to make an appropriate decision,
- affords potential foster parents an opportunity to discuss their decision with others and consider its implications for their family,
- clarifies foster family expectations,
- presents a realistic picture of what foster parenting involves, and
- allows potential foster parents to consider and explore the different types of foster children they might best serve.[1]

Foster Parents Who Are "Loss Experts" Are Needed

Foster care professionals state that foster parents are needed who can adequately deal with the separations and losses that foster care imposes on foster parents and foster children. Preservice training should help select foster parents who can (1) help children deal with the loss of their birth parents and (2) deal with their own loss of foster children when the children are returned to their parents or adopted.

The separation of children and parents that occurs in foster care produces profound shock, hurt, and often unpredictable behavior in children. This separation is usually injurious to children's self-concept.[2] For foster children, it is a painful, frightening, shocking, bewildering loss that usually precipitates a grieving process with its stages of shock, denial, anger, bargaining,[3] despair, detachment, acceptance, and moving on.[4] Children's reactions to the separation might range from feelings of abandonment, helplessness, anger, and guilt to a distrust of all adults and a distortion of overall character formation. Foster parents must help children deal with removal from their families and help prevent

[1]P. Ryan, "Foster Family Recruitment and Retention," p. 4; P. Ryan, "Systematic Development of Foster Parent Education," p. 1; P. Ryan, "Specialized Foster Families Educational Needs," Institute for the Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1987; Foster Parent Education Network newsletter, "Impact," Institute for the Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Spring 1988, p. 3; E.M. Pasztor, Preparation for Fostering . . . , pp. 1, 22f2, 23, and 183.

[2]New York State Child Welfare Training Institute, Fosterparentscope, p. III-2; D. Besharov, "The Misuse of Foster Care: When the Desire to Help Children Outruns the Ability to Improve Parental Functioning," Family Law Quarterly, Vol. 20, 1986, p. 220.

[3]During this stage foster children may promise to modify their inappropriate behavior if they can return home.

[4]Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Foster Parent Handbook, pp. II-1, 4, 5, 16, and 18; State of New Jersey, Department of Human Services, Division of Youth and Family Services, Foster Parent Handbook, May 1988, p. B2.

this traumatic separation experience from being more damaging to foster children than the situation in the home they were removed from.[5]

Professionals indicate that foster parents themselves face separation and loss issues when foster children are returned to their parents or adopted. Separation and loss dynamics apply stress to foster families. The feelings of grief that foster children experience when removed from their own homes are also experienced by foster families when foster children leave foster homes. If these feelings go unaddressed by foster families, they may compound with each succeeding loss and foster families may then experience chronic grief.

Accordingly, some foster care professionals believe it important to select foster parents who have experienced loss in their own lives, have resolved their loss issues, and are not currently experiencing a loss. These losses may include death, divorce, moving, transfers, handicaps, infertility, and other issues. If foster parents have unresolved loss issues, foster parenting will bring them to the surface and foster parents may be unable to deal with foster children. Placement disruptions (i.e., movement of foster children to another foster home) can result, or other harmful experiences for the foster child and foster family may occur. Shifting children through unsuited homes denies them the consistent support and nurturing needed.[6] Professionals indicate that foster parents who can deal with separations and losses are better able to help foster children and more likely to continue fostering. A leading foster care professional refers to such foster parents as "loss experts."[7]

Region XI of the Texas' Department of Human Services has criteria for potential foster parents that assesses (1) how potential foster parents dealt with losses in their own lives and (2) whether foster parents have the ability to help children move through the grieving process by accepting feelings of denial, anger, and depression.

[5]E.M. Pasztor, Preparation for Fostering . . . , pp. 63, 81, 176, and 210.

[6]D. Besharov, "The Misuse of Foster Care: When the Desire to Help Children Outruns the Ability to Improve Parental Functioning," p. 220.

[7]E.M. Pasztor, principal author of the MAPP and NOVA University preservice training models discussed later in this chapter.

Teamwork and Mutual Decisionmaking Are Needed

Foster care professionals stress that preservice training should emphasize teamwork and mutual decisionmaking among foster parents and social service agencies, and afford status to the role of foster parents. Preservice training should be a mutual selection process wherein potential foster families and social service agencies work together to evaluate the families' ability to care for foster children. They share information with each other about the needs and problems of foster children needing care. At the conclusion of preservice training, it is hoped that foster parents and social service agencies arrive at the same decision about the family's ability to care for foster children and the types of foster children the family might best serve.

In Massachusetts, foster parents are given a voice in planning their foster children's future. The Massachusetts Department of Social Services involves foster parents in developing a plan of services that the department agrees to provide foster children and birth parents. Foster parents are given access to background information on children coming into their care to help them deal with the children's emotional and behavioral problems.

In New Jersey, the foster parent association tries to help prospective foster parents know what questions to ask during preservice training and before placement of foster children so they can determine if they can handle the realities of caring for foster children and, if so, the type of children to take into their home.

A leading foster care professional has written that opposition of social service agencies to (1) using foster parents as trainers, (2) using experiential learning,[8] and (3) sharing decisionmaking with foster parents must be surmounted, regardless of the agencies' legal responsibility for foster children, in order to use a foster parent mutual selection and preparation process.[9]

Foster care literature supports the principle that foster parents and caseworkers need training on how to work together as a team on permanency planning. The reason most often cited for not implementing the practices inherent in the team concept are lack of training for both social workers and foster parents, failure to recruit adequate types of

[8]Includes simulations or exercises that place prospective foster parents in unrehearsed, stressful situations, which they will likely face once licensed.

[9]E.M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting," p. 198.

families, and high caseloads.[10] Foster care professionals assert that having both foster parents and caseworkers lead training sessions, and paying them both for that service, helps establish a teamwork attitude.

Preservice Training Should Prepare Foster Parents

As a preparation tool, preservice training for foster parents reduces placement disruptions, the length of time children are in care, and foster parent turnover.[11] Foster parent training generally attempts to teach parenting skills and help foster parents define and become comfortable with their roles as foster parents. An ideal preservice training program would include the following topics in its curriculum:

- the impact of placement on foster children, birth families, potential adoptive families, and the foster family;
- social service agency administrative processes;
- the rights, responsibilities, and roles of foster parents;
- attachment, separation, and loss issues faced by birth parents, foster children, and foster parents;
- child management and discipline;
- birth family relationships; and
- helping children leave foster care.

Caring for foster children requires major adjustments on the part of the entire foster family for which they must be prepared. Frequent changes may be required in such things as time schedules, home projects, and school activities. Also, family assumptions regarding rules, communication patterns, and relationships may be challenged. Preservice training with sharing of information between parents and social workers can enhance foster families' abilities to integrate foster children into their homes.[12]

[10]P. Ryan, "Developing Educational Seminars . . . ," p. 1; P. Ryan, "Systematic Development of Foster Parent Education," p. 1; E.M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting . . . ," p. 200.

[11]E.M. Pasztor, Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting for Foster Parents and Adoptive Parents, Child Welfare Institute, Atlanta, Georgia, August 1988, p. 1; R.D. Simon and D.K. Simon, "The Effect of Foster Parent Selection and Training on Service Delivery," Child Welfare, Vol. 61, No. 8, November/December 1982, p. 523; E.M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting . . . ," p. 198.

[12]E.J. McFadden, "Practice in Foster Care," p. 600.

In addition, presenting the rights and responsibilities of foster parents during preservice training helps avoid unfulfilled expectations. Furthermore, clarifying the role of foster parents vis-a-vis the social service agency sets the stage for teamwork.

Models of Preservice Training Programs

Two model programs for preservice training of foster parents used in several states are (1) the NOVA University "model for foster family preparation and selection" (NOVA) and (2) the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting for Foster Parents and Adoptive Parents (MAPP). Both of these models are approaches for the selection and preparation of foster parents that emphasize teamwork, mutual selection, and working with birth parents, and deal with the topics mentioned above. The NOVA and MAPP models have the same principal author.[13]

The NOVA model was developed in the mid-1970s at NOVA University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, under a research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health with matching funds from the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. It is foster family preservice and mutual selection training that simultaneously screens and trains foster parents. Training exercises preview potential situations foster families may face so insight can be gained by the social service agency and foster family about their ability to respond. The training is designed to promote group development whereby social service agencies and foster parents can explore potential foster parents' motivations for fostering, ability to work with others, attitudes toward discipline and birth parents, and their problem-solving abilities, flexibility, and sensitivity to foster care dynamics. NOVA training is generally 21 hours in length, consisting of a 3-hour orientation and six 3-hour sessions. Data are not available on how many states are using NOVA.

MAPP is a refinement of the NOVA model developed in the mid-1980s. It includes potential adoptive parents in addition to potential foster parents, and places greater emphasis than NOVA on defining the roles of foster parents and the welfare system and dealing with critical separation and loss issues. MAPP uses experiential activities and a group process to help parents decide if their expectations match the realities of foster and adoptive parenthood. MAPP emphasizes the need for foster parents who have experienced and resolved loss issues so they can help foster

[13]E.M. Pasztor, Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting for Foster Parents and Adoptive Parents; E.M. Pasztor, "Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting . . . ," pp. 193-196; R.D. Simon and D.K. Simon, "The Effect of Foster Parent Selection and Training on Service Delivery," p. 515.

children deal with loss and separation from birth parents. MAPP includes criteria for assessing potential foster parents in terms of (1) how they dealt with losses in their own lives and (2) whether they have the ability to help children move through the grieving process by accepting feelings of denial, anger, and depression. Because foster families are increasingly considered the best resource for adoption of children in their care, some believe that combining foster and adoptive parent training is a way to prepare parents for both roles.

MAPP was developed through a joint project of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services and the Center for Foster and Residential Care of the Child Welfare Institute in Atlanta. As further explained in chapter 5, the Center is a federally supported resource for technical assistance in foster care. Region XI of the Texas Department of Human Services provided support for pilot testing of MAPP, and the North Carolina Division of Social Services supported development of a foster parent specific version.

MAPP classroom training is generally 30 hours long, consisting of 10 3-hour sessions. Material describing the content of MAPP sessions is copyrighted by the Child Welfare Institute, Atlanta, Georgia. The Institute offers a program that trains and certifies persons to be MAPP trainers. The Executive Director of the Institute told us that parts of MAPP have been adopted in 14 states. MAPP has been offered to foster and adoptive parents in Massachusetts since 1985.

Appendix I contains highlights of the foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs of the states we visited.

Evaluation and Demonstration of Effective Recruiting Strategies

Reliable statistical data on state recruitment and retention of foster parents are not generally available, and few formal evaluations of recruiting strategies and preservice training programs have been reported. HHS is funding grants to demonstrate effective foster parent recruiting and retaining practices and develop private sector technical assistance resources to help state foster care programs. The demonstration grants address evaluation of results, but few contain plans for a comprehensive evaluation of various demonstration activities. Foster care professionals say there is need for a more effective and central mechanism for social service agencies to exchange information on successful recruiting and preservice training programs.

Lack of Statistics on Foster Parent Recruiting and Retention

Foster care professionals told us that few state foster care programs collect or maintain reliable statistical data on foster parent recruitment and retention. Such statistics might include, for example, the number of (1) inquiries generated by various publicity techniques for recruiting foster parents; (2) persons invited to attend and attending functions where information on foster parenting is provided; (3) applications for foster parent approval requested, submitted, and approved; and (4) persons attending preservice training. Also, statistics on foster parent retention might include the length of time persons serve as foster parents, how foster parents were recruited, training received by foster parents, and personal characteristics of foster parents, such as age and education.

While states do collect data on the numbers of foster homes, the reliability of the data varies due to differences in definitions. For example, with regard to statewide numbers of foster homes reported by social service agencies, an official of one state we visited said that some homes are considered "inactive," but may continue to be counted in the total number of available homes or homes closed. Another state official explained that net or total numbers of foster homes do not always reflect whether homes are available for the types of children needing them. For example, some homes have no children in them because they are unable to take adolescents, while others may have several children. A state official explained that when looking at net numbers of foster homes, the fact may be lost that closure of a certain number of "restricted" homes (those that take only one particular type of child) and approval or licensure of an equal number of unrestricted or regular homes (those that take any type of child) may actually be a gain for foster care in the net number of opportunities to care for foster children. In terms of meeting the need for foster homes, unrestricted or regular homes hold more potential for placing children than restricted ones.

Lack of Formal Evaluations of Foster Parent Recruiting Strategies

Strategies that localities use to recruit foster parents vary, but little empirical evidence exists as to which strategies work well. We found only a few formal evaluations of foster parent recruiting strategies. The principles of effective foster parent recruiting discussed in chapter 3 are asserted by foster care professionals based largely on their experience.

Evaluative information could be useful to some localities. For example, some localities use marketing and advertising firms to develop recruiting strategies, while others do not. Some localities develop their own preservice training while others adopt already developed programs. Professional marketing and advertising firms have developed some recruitment advertisements that do not picture children in them. Yet, one social service agency official we interviewed observed that, in her experience, recruitment advertisements that picture children are more appealing to potential foster parents. She noted that her agency's program received a greater number of inquiries during a year in which advertisements with children were used. Evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of different recruiting and preservice training strategies could be helpful to social service agencies in deciding whether to adopt a program or strategy.

HHS officials told us that states may use federal funds they receive under title IV-B of the Social Security Act for research and demonstration and evaluation projects. These officials said, however, that state priorities for use of these funds are, and always have been, based on critical direct service needs, such as responding to reports of child abuse and neglect and providing support and reunification services to families. HHS officials said that for states to use these funds for research and demonstration and evaluation projects, they would have to take money away from services they are currently funding.

HHS Support of Foster Parent Recruiting and Retention Strategies

HHS is supporting the demonstration of effective foster parent recruitment and retention strategies and the development of private sector technical assistance resources. The demonstration grants provide for measuring results against expected outcomes, but few plan for a comprehensive evaluation that would examine the effectiveness of various demonstration activities in such a way to allow causal inferences to be made about the results.

HHS Grants to Demonstrate Effective Strategies

Under the Coordinated Discretionary (grant) Program (CDP), administered by HHS's Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, the federal government awarded 10 research and demonstration grants aimed at developing effective programs for recruitment and retention of foster homes. The 10 grants were approved in fiscal years 1987 and 1988. No grants for recruitment and retention of foster homes are planned to be approved under this program in fiscal year 1989; this area was not designated as one eligible for grants for this fiscal year. HHS officials told us that this is largely because the 10 grants are ongoing; it is not an indication that the Children's Bureau within HHS views foster home recruitment and retention as no longer important.

The length of the 10 grants range from 20 to 29 months and individual grant funding ranges from $50,000 to $200,000 each. Four grants were approved in fiscal year 1987, and were awarded funds totaling $406,299. Because funding was awarded late in fiscal year 1987, three of these projects are ongoing but nearing completion. Six additional grants were approved in fiscal year 1988, for funding totaling $599,829. Funding for five of the six was not awarded until calendar year 1989. Accordingly, all six of these grants are in their early stages.

The 10 grants awarded deal with the following areas: (1) recruitment and retention of American Indian foster homes; (2) a regional media foster parent recruitment campaign; (3) recruitment of foster homes for children with mental retardation and emotional and behavioral disorders; (4) recruitment and retention of Hispanic foster homes; (5) recruitment and retention of foster homes for drug-involved infants, sibling groups, and minority children; (6) recruitment, training, and retention of foster homes for medically fragile infants and young children; (7) a statewide media campaign, retention study, and training program for foster parents and social service agency staff; (8) recruitment strategies, training and support services for foster homes for adolescents; (9) a team treatment approach to enhance foster home placement of children 14 to 16 years old; and (10) development of a community-based regionwide foster parent recruitment and retention project to demonstrate the benefits of community involvement in foster care. Most of these grants involve multiple activities to increase foster parent recruitment and retention.

Evaluation Components of HHS Demonstration Grants

HHS's criteria for reviewing applications for CDP demonstration grants include consideration of proposed grants' plans for evaluating expected outcomes. The 10 grants awarded for demonstration of effective foster parent recruiting strategies include plans to measure outcomes, but

neither the HHS criteria nor most of the grants provide for evaluating the relative effectiveness of various demonstration activities. According to HHS procedures, demonstration grant applications are scored competitively against criteria that award a maximum of 15 points for evaluation of outcomes. The criteria suggest that grant applications detail evaluation plans and procedures that are capable of measuring the degree to which project objectives are accomplished. An HHS official told us, however, that having this evaluation component in a grant is not an absolute requirement for approval. Yet evaluative information is especially important for providing evidence of effectiveness to potential users of demonstration results.[1]

We reviewed the applications submitted for the 10 foster parent recruiting and retention grants and found that most did not contain detailed plans for evaluating results. We found that the applications for the demonstration grants included a statement that results would be measured and compared with expected outcomes, but they do not contain a comprehensive plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the demonstration that would allow for causal inferences. Generally, the grant applications included a paragraph or less discussing comparison of actual with expected results. The applications indicated that comparisons were planned of the number of foster parents recruited and retained before and after the demonstration, but few indicated how or if they would assess the different recruiting approaches tried in the demonstration to determine their relative effectiveness. Few of the grant applications included designs that would enable causal inferences on the effects of the demonstration to be drawn. Strong evidence of effectiveness requires not only measurable outcomes but also elimination of competing explanations for them.[2]

Grant to Develop Private Sector Resources—The Center for Foster and Residential Care

In order to assist in the development of a private sector resource for technical assistance on foster care, HHS awarded a grant to establish the Center for Foster and Residential Care. The Center is a division of the Child Welfare Institute, and was established under a grant awarded to the Institute in October 1985, for the purpose of helping improve the capacity of states to use exemplary methods and resources in providing foster care services to children. The Center is one of 10 child welfare resource centers established under federal grant by the Children's

[1]HUD Demonstration Programs—Their Use As a Policy Tool (GAO/IPE-83-4, Mar. 8, 1983), p. 14.

[2]HUD Demonstration Programs . . . , p. 26.

Bureau for the purpose of providing leadership in the identification, collection, development, dissemination, and utilization of program models, system improvements, training programs, and other resources on effective methods of addressing child welfare service needs. Under the terms of the grant, the Center is to receive payment for its services and become self-supporting. The original grant to the Center was for a 3-year period but it has been extended to a 5-year period to run through September 1990; funding awarded for the first 4 years through September 1989 totals $882,253.

ACYF officials told us that the philosophy behind the Center for Foster and Residential Care was not to establish an information clearinghouse, but rather a source of "excellence" or quality information. ACYF officials explained that clearinghouses generally contain all available information on a subject, regardless of quality. In establishing the Center, ACYF officials explained, HHS wanted to establish a source for social service agencies of the best in foster care practices, including training and technical assistance.

Accordingly, the Center has developed a model for foster parent recruiting and training that embodies the principles of effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training described in chapters 3 and 4 of this report. Working in cooperation with several state social service agencies, the Center also developed the MAPP model for combined foster and adoptive parent selection and preparation, described in chapter 4 of this report. MAPP is one element of the Center's model for foster parent recruiting and training. The Center offers an assessment service to foster care agencies wherein agency recruiting and retention strategies can be examined in terms of the model. The Center's model (and MAPP) is copyrighted and details were not available for our publication.

The Center has also developed training programs for (1) foster care workers in social service agencies on assessment and planning for family reunification or adoption, (2) foster parents who entered foster care before MAPP became available to new foster parents, and (3) foster parents and foster care workers from social service agencies on preparing children to leave foster care. The Center is developing (1) a training system for foster care, (2) an assessment model for use by local agencies in developing foster care services, and (3) a desk reference for social service agency workers to help foster parents decide about adopting children who have been with them as foster children.

Center and HHS officials told us that states are allowed to purchase Center services using federal title IV-B money and that they believe some states are doing so. We did not determine the extent to which states are doing this.

More Effective Central Mechanism for Information Exchange Needed

Foster care professionals we talked to, particularly social service agencies, indicated a need for a better mechanism to assist them in exchanging information on effective foster parent recruiting methods and their experiences with different techniques. Social service agencies have or are undertaking their own independent efforts to research the field of knowledge on recruiting practices. They are networking and exchanging information on an ad hoc and informal basis with program operators in other localities without the benefit of one central source of information. The ability of the Center for Foster and Residential Care to assist in the exchange and free flow of information on practices for foster parent recruiting and preservice training is limited by the fact that it must charge for its services and copyright its products to survive.

HHS does not directly provide technical assistance to state and local social service agencies, although in the past it had. The Children's Bureau within ACYF has a mission of providing technical assistance through information dissemination. Legislation establishing the Bureau in 1912 mandated that it help state and local groups. The Bureau, however, has only three specialists, none of whom work full-time on foster care issues. In 1968, the Children's Bureau had 54 specialists/consultants who provided consultation and training to persons in state agencies. An HHS official told us that money has not been available for travel of Children's Bureau specialists; as a result, their ability to provide direct technical assistance has been limited.

Conclusions

Strategies for recruiting and preservice training of foster parents asserted by foster care professionals and practiced in varying degrees by some states have received little formal evaluation. Because the strategies that localities use to recruit foster parents vary and little empirical evidence exists as to which are better, validating the effectiveness of these strategies could be useful.

A general lack of reliable statistical data on foster parent recruiting and retention makes it difficult to evaluate the relative merits of different state strategies. Only a few formal evaluations of foster parent recruiting strategies have been reported in the literature.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of HHS conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of various states' and localities' foster parent recruiting strategies.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

HHS agreed with our recommendation and said that our report provides a useful overview of problems in recruiting foster parents. HHS suggested that we circulate our report to state foster care agencies as a guide for their administrators and foster care recruitment staff.

Also, HHS stated that, in fiscal year 1989, it will fund a national study of issues affecting foster parent recruiting and retention. The study will address many critical issues, including:

- the household characteristics of foster parents,
- individuals' reasons for becoming foster parents,
- the impact of community characteristics (e.g., urban, rural, unemployment rate) on recruiting and retention, and
- the independent and interactive effects of foster parent and foster child characteristics on recruiting and retaining foster parents.

HHS is currently evaluating proposals for the study. HHS comments are contained in appendix IV.

The HHS study should provide much information that foster care program administrators need and can use in making their programs more effective. However, we believe that a comparative evaluation of the effectiveness of various states' foster parent recruiting strategies would also provide information that program administrators could use to improve their programs. For example, a comparative evaluation of the relative effectiveness of contracting with foster parent associations for recruiting versus using state employees to do the recruiting would be useful to foster care administrators. Also, a comparision of different advertising techniques, such as those picturing children versus those that do not, would also be useful.

Highlights of Selected States' Foster Parent Recruiting and Preservice Training Programs

This appendix summarizes highlights of the foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs of Massachusetts, New Jersey, Region XI of Texas' Department of Human Services, Michigan, and Illinois. The appendix notes practices that foster care professionals indicated contribute to effective foster parent recruiting and preservice training programs.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts' foster parent recruiting and preservice training program combines recruiting, retention, and public education efforts. The program is most notable for the partnership existing between the state and foster parents and for the variety of activities it uses to give recognition, appreciation, and support to foster parents.

Partnership Relationship With Foster Parents

Massachusetts promotes partnership in its foster care program. Its preservice training program, referred to as the Massachusetts Approach to Partnerships in Parenting, is given jointly by foster parents and social workers, who bring two distinct perspectives to the preservice training program. The program is the same as the MAPP program described in chapter 5 and, as such, combines foster parent assessment, training, and preparation.

In developing plans for the care and future of foster children, foster parents are given access to background information on children coming into their care to work effectively with the children's emotional and behavioral problems. Foster parents are given a voice in planning their foster children's future. The Massachusetts Department of Social Services involves foster parents in developing a plan of services that the department agrees to provide foster children and birth parents.

The partnership concept also extends to recruiting foster parents. The statewide foster parent association assists with recruiting efforts through participation, for example, at fairs or speaking engagements.

The success of Massachusetts' efforts was recognized by the National Foster Parent Association when it presented Massachusetts with its 1987 state agency of the year award for the outstanding partnership relationship Massachusetts has developed with its foster parents. Massachusetts' foster parent recruiting campaign was also recognized by an award in 1988 from the American Public Welfare Association. The award honored the Massachusetts Department of Social Services as the best in the country for a successful, innovative human services program.

Foster Parent Recruitment Handbook

Massachusetts has developed a Foster Parent Recruitment Handbook that is used as a guide in developing recruiting campaigns statewide. The handbook can also be used by other states as a guide in their own recruiting campaigns. It describes the basis for a foster care recruiting campaign and outlines methods for recruiting foster families. The handbook emphasizes awareness of the diversity within communities, as well as the diverse needs of the children who need foster homes. Guidance is provided on such topics as (1) campaign goals and objectives, (2) public education, (3) recruiting strategies and tips, and (4) recruiting resources (e.g., media and community contacts and recruiting materials).

Recognition and Appreciation of Foster Parents

Throughout the year, special recognition and appreciation events and dinners are given for foster parents statewide. The state's governor designated May as the state's foster parent recognition month. In May, the commissioner of social services holds an annual recognition event to honor outstanding foster parents statewide. Foster parents are presented with awards, and stories are read about their lives and achievements as foster parents. In addition, regional and area offices of the social service department hold recognition events. Massachusetts also has dedicated the month of March to honoring social workers as evidence of the partnership relationship.

The Massachusetts Department of Social Services also publishes a quarterly foster parent newsletter, The Professional Parent, which provides information on available foster parent supports, including numerous training opportunities offered by the state. It also reports news of the state's foster parent association, and gives recognition to accomplishments of individual foster parents.

Support of Foster Parents

Support for foster parents in Massachusetts is provided in a variety of ways, including the state's social service department purchasing liability insurance for foster parents' activities directly related to foster parenting. Also, the state pays foster parents' $15 membership fee in the Massachusetts Association for Professional Foster Care, the state's foster parent association. The association is a statewide organization that works closely with the state's social agency for the needs of all participants involved in substitute care—children, foster parents, adoptive parents, and social workers. The development of the association was an outgrowth of the state's emphasis on partnership. The association embraces the teamwork concept and the professionalization of foster parenting.

In addition to the association, there are foster parent support groups throughout the state. These support groups give foster parents an opportunity to share their experiences, frustrations, and hopes and gain assistance from peers to resolve conflicts or make important decisions. The state's Department of Social Services has foster parent liaisons in its area offices. These liaisons perform a wide range of tasks, including training, recruiting, information sharing, and supportive networking for foster parents and agency staff.

New Jersey

The most notable feature of the New Jersey foster care program is the close working relationship between the state and the foster parent association and tangible support given to foster parents by the state. This relationship is highlighted by a state contract with the foster parent association. Under the contract, the association has run a statewide recruiting and public education campaign and training program since 1985. The role of the association as stated in its contract with the state is to provide

"... protective, supportive, and technical assistance services to foster parents throughout the state in an effort to improve the foster care service delivery system ... the focus is a teamwork/partnership model ...."

Foster Parent Recruiting and Training

The foster parent association recruiting program presents parenting as a rewarding and challenging role by conveying in recruiting material the theme that as a foster parent one has to provide love, care, and much more. The association tries to help prospective foster parents know what questions to ask during preservice training and before placement of foster children so they can determine if they can handle the realities of caring for foster children and, if so, the type of children to take into their home. The foster parent association employs Public Relations/Recruiting Field Workers to assist with recruiting. These positions are held by foster parents and were created to help recruit and aid in the retention of foster parents.

Through its in-service training program, the association provides knowledge and builds skills in foster parents and caseworkers during the time foster parents are caring for a foster child. The program was the first in the nation to provide foster parents with this type of training. Foster parents and caseworkers are both simultaneously given training and then paid as trainers. Foster parents who attend training are reimbursed

for mileage and child care expenses. Furthermore, foster parents who complete 16 weeks of training receive $25 per month for 1 year.

Public Education on Foster Care

The foster parent association, as part of its public education campaign to heighten public awareness of the role of foster parents and foster care issues, conducts public forums and informs community leaders of the depth of foster care issues. It encourages community leaders and groups to become involved in recruiting foster parents. Some of the activities include making public service announcements, serving on county foster care task forces, and hosting special recruiting and/or foster parent recognition events.

The association's public education campaign also presents foster parenting as a rewarding, challenging, and professional role, thus improving the public's image of foster parents. In addition to providing information about becoming a foster parent, the association has a statewide hotline that is answered by a foster parent who is a paid employee.

Support of Foster Parents

Support for foster parents in New Jersey is provided in a variety of ways, including the state paying for foster care support workers who are foster parents to work with the state agency and foster parents in the coordination of foster care activities and provide technical assistance and support to foster parents. Also, the state provides, free liability protection for foster parents against third-party claims and financial losses arising out of damage done to their property by foster children. In addition, the state provides funding for the foster parent association's newsletter. A New Jersey state official told us that further evidence of support for foster parents in the state was illustrated by the state's social service agency supporting legislation now under consideration that would authorize an advanced training program for foster parents. The New Jersey legislature is also considering authorizing a respite program for foster parents and an "enrichment fund" to pay foster parents for the cost of special programs or enrichment activities in which a foster child participates.

The state's foster parent association also supports foster parents. It runs an outreach program that provides support services, such as information and referrals to help in solving problems with foster children and advocating foster families. Local association chapters throughout the state conduct numerous special events and projects as well as give foster parents the opportunity to share their experiences. These special events

and projects include such activities as fund raising, distributing newsletters, and organizing training forums.

In recognition of the support and team relationship in the state, in May 1986, the foster parent association, the state's social service agency, and business and child advocacy interests in the state were given the "Team Player" award by American Foster Care Resources, Inc., an organization that sells training material and performs studies related to foster care. The award noted the partnership and team spirit that the state puts forth in working with foster parents and members of the public and private sector to elevate the role of foster parents and the foster care program.

Texas, Region XI

In July 1987, HHS provided Harris County, Texas—on behalf of itself and the other 12 counties in east Texas comprising Region XI of the Texas Department of Human Services—a $196,200 grant titled "Community Approach to Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents." The purpose of the grant was to develop a community-based regionwide recruiting and retaining project to demonstrate the benefits of community involvement in foster care. The project consists of locally organized and sponsored events to increase (1) awareness of the need for more foster parents, and (2) support and recognition of foster parents who serve the community's children.

Data collected on the project for Harris County, which has about 71 percent of all the foster children in the region, shows that, as of August 1988, compared with the same months in 1987, the county experienced a 59-percent increase in the rate at which new foster care homes were recruited and approved, and a 25-percent decrease in the rate at which such homes withdrew from the program.

A guidebook is being developed that will include a detailed description of the project's methods and products. The main purpose of the guidebook is to provide a framework and implementation strategy that can be adapted by other social service agencies. The guidebook will emphasize the need for a partnership among agency officials and staff, foster parents, and the community in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of qualified foster parents. The guidebook is being written by and will be copyrighted and sold by the Child Welfare Institute, Atlanta, Georgia, the same organization that operates the Center for Foster and Residential Care.

Project Organization

To increase local awareness of the need for more foster parents and increase the support and recognition of foster parents, the 13-county area was divided into three areas, each served by a community-based task force. The three areas consisted of Harris County—made up primarily of the city of Houston—the southern outlying counties, and the northern outlying counties surrounding Houston. The task forces have developed strong community support by establishing foster parent recruiting and retaining committees that are supported by political, civic, and religious leaders as well as foster parents. The task forces plan strategies and events to recruit foster parents and address issues that affect the retention and participation of foster parents who care for children.

A regional recruiting and retaining steering committee was also established to direct data collection, monitor recruiting and retaining activities, support resource development and sharing among local task forces, and ensure a strong relationship between recruiting and retention strategies throughout the 13-county region. The committee is comprised of a foster parent, staff member, and community leader from each of the three task forces plus key regional social service agency staff.

Community Involvement

The project organization itself is designed to solicit community involvement and acceptance of foster care as a community problem. Its unique feature is that community volunteers work in partnership with Region XI staff and foster parents to develop more effective methods for recruiting and retaining foster parents. Through such cooperative efforts it is hoped that, after the project is completed, the partnership method of recruiting and retaining foster parents will continue.

Examples of community involvement include: (1) food markets distributing bag stuffers with recruiting information or printing information on their grocery bags, (2) fast food restaurants distributing placemats with recruiting themes on them, (3) a civic group providing free tickets to foster families for an ice cream social, (4) members of youth groups at local churches babysitting for foster parents, and (5) local banks including recruiting flyers in account statements to their depositors.

Support of Foster Parents

Several efforts to provide support for foster parents have been developed through the project's recruiting and retention committees. For example, Harris County, which has about 71 percent of all the foster children in the region, established a support program whereby selected

foster parents, called foster parents' advisors, provide special help to others who are experiencing difficulties in performing their role as foster parents. Advisors assist in such areas of concern as discipline methods, housekeeping and hygiene practices, communication and cooperation with the social service agency, and dealing with separation and loss.

In addition, the project's Harris County community task force has been successful in starting a respite program for foster parents in the county. Under the program, $60 will be provided annually to each of the approximately 250 foster families for respite. Furthermore, the task force gained the cooperation of a local day care center in the county, which has agreed to accept foster children and foster parents' own children on a drop-in basis for only $1 per hour per child.

Michigan

Michigan's foster parent recruiting program uses a variety of different strategies specifically targeted at getting foster parents for the types of children most in need of care. The program is notable for recruiting efforts aimed at minorities, and the use in recruiting efforts of a combination of (1) full-time recruiters, (2) the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, and (3) foster parents as recruiters.

Targeted Foster Parent Recruiting Programs

To meet the needs of various types of Michigan children for foster care and to recruit foster parents who can effectively serve these children, the state of Michigan has specific strategies targeted at various populations in the state.

To fill the great need for foster homes for black children in Michigan, the state's social service agency has a unique partnership and an annual contract with One Church, One Child of Michigan, Inc., to recruit black foster homes. The partnership began in 1986. One Church, One Child, Inc., was originally started in Illinois in 1981, by the Reverend George Clements as a program for recruiting adoptive parents; it is now active in 32 states.

In Michigan, One Church, One Child was formed by 30 members from different churches statewide to heighten awareness in the black community of the need for more foster parents and to find such homes through local churches. The organization serves as a key referral and inquiry source that directs prospective foster parents to the state's social service agency.

The One Church, One Child logo "Accept God's Gift of Love, Foster a Black Child Through One Church" attempts to get across the point that if every church would be responsible for getting one foster home from within the congregation, the need for foster care will be fulfilled. One Church, One Child presenters conduct recruiting activities in churches and give presentations to church groups in an effort to gain church-based support. State social service agency officials believe this program has been the best approach to recruiting in the black community.

Another group that Michigan has targeted for special attention is Native American foster children. Michigan established and provided funding for an intertribal council to direct efforts to care for Indian foster children. State officials believe their efforts have been successful; they are requesting proposals for performance of an assessment of the program.

The state's social service agency recently established a Medically Fragile Unit to target medically fragile foster children—infants and children with AIDS, children affected by substance abuse, and children with other special medical needs, such as congenital defects. Recruiting for this unit focuses on individuals who (1) have medical backgrounds or (2) are willing to be trained to provide the type of special care medically fragile children need. The Medically Fragile Unit's budget provides special training and supplies for foster parents willing to care for such children.

Other Recruiting Strategies

Michigan has full-time foster care recruiters and administrative support staff in 10 counties. These recruiters and their staff are responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive and effective county-specific program for recruiting under the state's overall guidance. To assist the recruiters, each county has a local support group that meets once a month to help with planning and implementing program ideas. Foster parents also work with the recruiters at the county level.

The state enters into an annual contract with the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association to recruit new foster parents in counties where there are no full-time recruiters. The association identifies a foster parent in each county as a liaison to those counties in the development, planning, and implementation of foster parent recruiting, retaining, and development. Some of the association's responsibilities include: determining the need and planning for ongoing recruiting of new foster families to meet the counties' needs; assisting with news media contacts; inviting and encouraging families to attend foster parent

orientations; and supporting and assisting local support groups with activities that promote and encourage retention of foster families.

In addition to the contract with the association, Michigan has a Mentor Program. This program pays $100 to any foster parent who recruits a single parent or couple into the state's foster care program, provided that the newly recruited foster parent(s) stays for 6 months or more. The recruiting foster parent also serves as a mentor to the new foster parent during the 6-month period. This unique approach gives foster parents an added incentive to recruit and provides much needed support to new foster parents.

Realizing that tapping all potential sources of foster parents is an effective recruiting strategy and that limited commitments to foster care are possible, one of Michigan's philosophies for recruiting foster parents is to convey that parents may make a commitment to provide foster care for only one child. This approach allows Michigan to tap potential foster parents who may not otherwise come forward because they fear an unlimited commitment. Furthermore, foster parents are less apt to feel like a failure if they decide to withdraw from foster care after that one child leaves their home.

Illinois

The major focus of Illinois' foster parent recruiting effort has been to raise the awareness and image of foster care in the community so there is a better climate for getting community support for programs and for getting potential foster parents to consider fostering.

Foster Care Initiative

In an effort to revamp its entire system, Illinois developed the Foster Care Initiative. This action plan identified issues relating to foster care, such as the need for liability insurance, comprehensive and coordinated training programs, statewide recruiting, and support services for foster families. As a result of the Foster Care Initiative, actions were taken, including the implementation of joint training with foster parents and new workers, an ongoing statewide recruiting campaign, a multimedia campaign, and a statewide survey of foster parents leaving the system.

These actions have been taken under the guidance of a Statewide Foster Care Advisory Committee and foster parent association. The committee, which acts as a steering committee for the Foster Care Initiative, has a membership that includes foster parents, private agencies, and community leaders.

Foster Parent Recruiting

Illinois trains its recruiting staff on public relations, the use of media, and interviewing and being interviewed. Foster parents accompany Illinois social service agency staff on television and radio talk shows about foster care. These efforts have been undertaken to educate the community about foster care, encourage community involvement, and raise the public's support and opinion of foster care and foster parents.

Illinois has identified target markets for recruiting in the workplace. It strives to form working partnerships with major employers in the state, specifically with military bases, the transit authority, and labor unions. The state also has developed a partnership with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The federation lobbied the need for foster parents to the state American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, which passed a resolution to build a network of local unions. Now Illinois has access to union members as a source of foster parents. Foster parents who are union members have been recruiting other foster parents from among union members. Foster parents participate in recruiting by speaking to church and civic groups, participating in media events about foster care, and providing initial information in response to inquiries about foster care. Illinois also targets foster parent recruiting efforts towards the retired, hospital staff, and singles.

Professionalizing Foster Care

Illinois is trying to professionalize foster parenting and to attain a professional identification for foster parents. The state employs some foster parents part-time on contract as support specialists who participate in the recruiting, training, and support of foster parents. Support specialists responsibilities toward foster parents include (1) maintaining face-to-face contact with them, (2) assisting in resolving problems, (3) providing support to parents experiencing stressful situations, and (4) developing support groups.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services contracts with designated foster homes to provide intensive care for children with special needs due to physical, mental, or behavioral impairments and for pregnant girls or young mothers. The agency also contracts with a limited number of "treatment homes" for children with severe physical, emotional, or behavioral problems that would ordinarily result in their institutional placement.

Also, realizing that foster parents need special skills and training to effectively serve the types of children entering foster care, Illinois has

established a "foster parent development specialist" position. Development specialists are responsible for the development of foster parents and foster homes in terms of training and the level of services offered. Illinois also conducts joint training of caseworkers and foster parents to encourage working as a team.

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Comments From the Department of Health and Human Services

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of Inspector General

Washington, D.C. 20201

JUN 1 1989

Mr. Lawrence H. Thompson
Assistant Comptroller General
United States General
Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Enclosed are the Department's comments on your draft report, "Foster Care: Professional's Views of Foster Parent Recruiting and Preservice Training." The enclosed comments represent the tentative position of the Department and are subject to reevaluation when the final version of this report is received.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on this draft report before its publication.

Sincerely yours,

Richard P. Kusserow
Inspector General

Enclosure

COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ON THE U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT, "FOSTER CARE: PROFESSIONALS' VIEWS OF FOSTER PARENT RECRUITING AND PRESERVICE TRAINING" (GAO/HRD-89-86)

General Comments

We believe that this report provides a broad and useful overview of the current problems with the recruitment and training of foster parents. In fact, with a few editing changes, we would suggest that this report be widely circulated to the States and foster care agencies as a guide for their administrators and foster care recruitment staff.

The only statement in the report which is of concern is on page 50 and reads: "Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) officials told us that there is no restriction on the use by states of federal foster care funding they receive under title IV-B of the Social Security Act for research and demonstration and evaluation projects." We request that the sentence and the remainder of the paragraph be dropped.

Foster care is made available under title IV-E while child welfare services funds are provided under title IV-B. With that change, the statement is true. The sentence also implies that States could and should be using title IV-B funds for such projects. Child welfare services funds, including funds which potentially could be used by States for research, demonstration and evaluation projects, have always been in short supply in the States; the Federal contribution, under title IV-B, relative to State funds is small. State priorities for the use of these funds is, and always has been, on critical direct service needs, e.g. responding to reports of child abuse and neglect, providing support and reunification services to families. For States to use these funds for research, demonstration and evaluation, they would have to take money away from services they are currently funding.

While GAO was charged with reviewing recruitment and training, we believe that retention is certainly as important, if not more important, to the availability of foster parents. In-service training is an important mechanism for retaining foster parents but is not addressed in this report. High caseloads and staff turnover prevent the development of relationships between agency staff, foster parents, and foster children. Many factors contribute to the agency's ability to retain foster parents.

GAO Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of HHS conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of various States' and localities' foster parent recruiting strategies.

Department Comment

We concur with the recommendation that the Department evaluate various approaches to recruitment. The Department has been aware of the need for information on recruitment and retention of foster parents and will fund, this fiscal year, a national study, "Evaluation of Issues Currently Affecting the Recruitment and Retention of Family Foster Parents," which will address critical evaluation issues including:

a. What are the household characteristics of foster parents and their reasons for becoming a foster parent?

b. What are the independent and interactive effects of foster parent characteristics and foster child characteristics on the recruitment and retention of foster parents?

c. What types of opportunities are agencies providing for foster parent training and participation in decision making about their foster child? Are these activities effective in retaining foster parents?

d. Why have former foster parents left foster parenting? What actions might have encouraged them to remain foster parents?

e. What community characteristics (e.g., unemployment rate) have had an impact on the recruitment and retention of foster parents?

f. Does the recruitment and retention of foster parents differ in urban and rural settings?

g. What alternatives to foster parents must agencies rely upon in the absence of a sufficient number of foster parents and continuing requirements for protective care?

The Office of Human Development Services will be able to use the information from this study to establish future year priorities for the use of discretionary funds to improve recruitment and retention of foster parents.

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